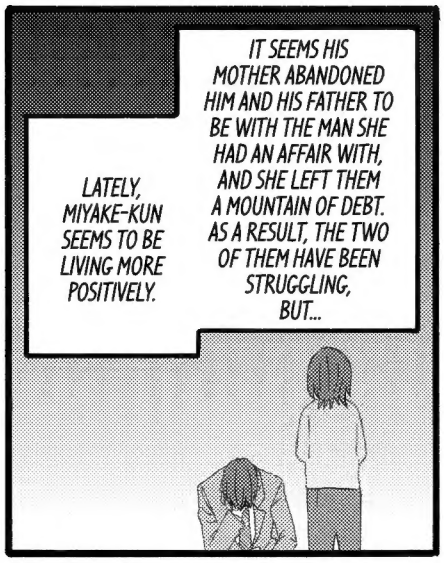
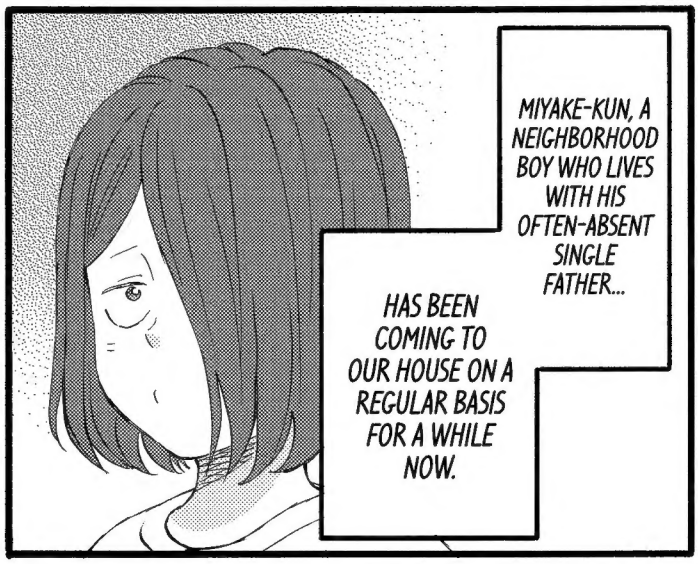
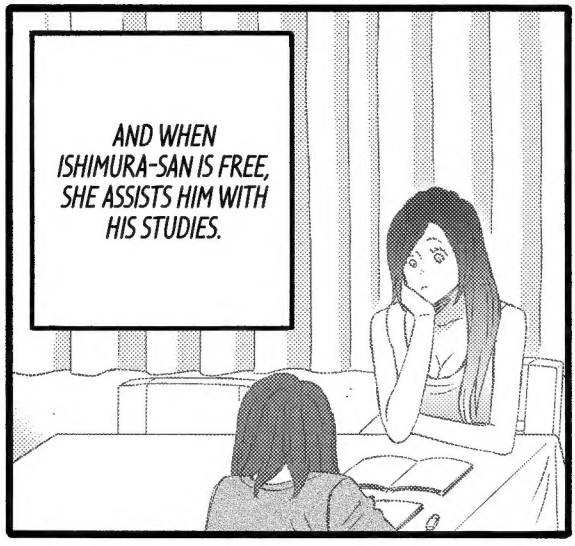
Chapter 44: Kirishima-kun and Ishimura-san's Balance

THANK YOU, MIYAKE-KUN.
KIRISHIMA-SAN, I CUT THE ONION.

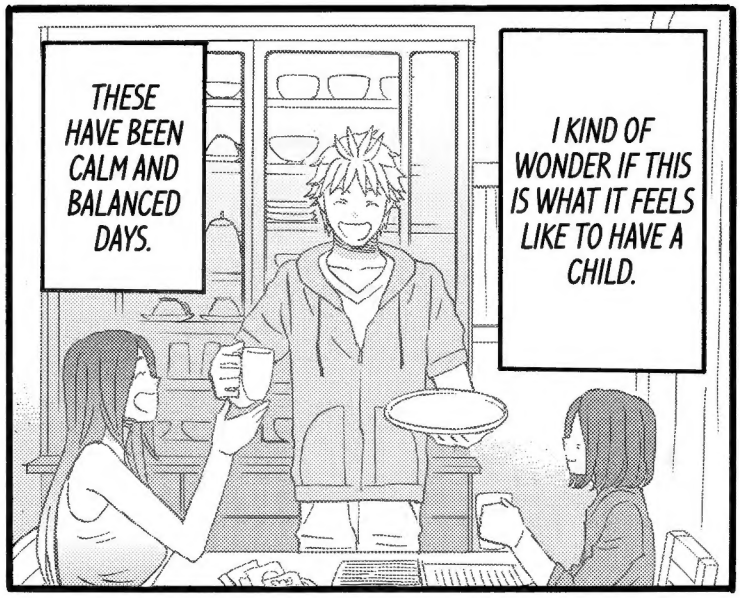

LATELY, MIYAKE-KUN SEEMS TO BE LIVING MORE POSITIVELY.
IT SEEMS HIS MOTHER ABANDONED HIM AND HIS FATHER TO BE WITH THE MAN SHE HAD AN AFFAIR WITH, AND SHE LEFT THEM A MOUNTAIN OF DEBT. AS A RESULT, THE TWO OF THEM HAVE BEEN STRUGGLING, BUT...


MIYAKE-KUN, A NEIGHBORHOOD BOY WHO LIVES WITH HIS OFTEN-ABSENT SINGLE FATHER...
HAS BEEN COMING TO OUR HOUSE ON A REGULAR BASIS FOR A WHILE NOW.

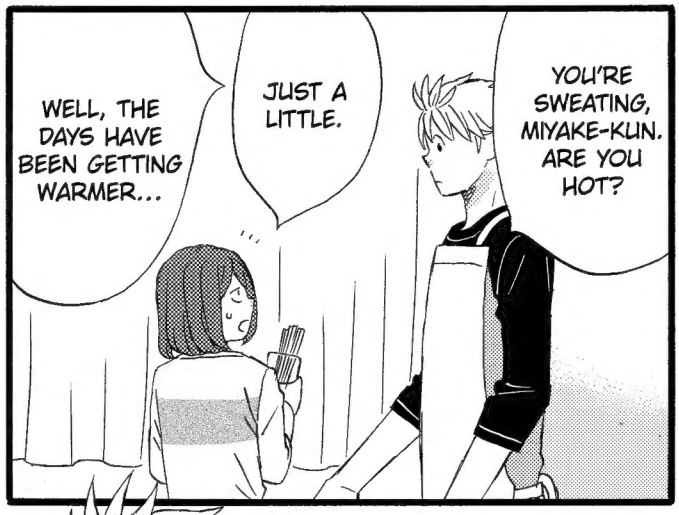

AND WHEN ISHIMURA-SAN IS FREE, SHE ASSISTS HIM WITH HIS STUDIES.

HE ALWAYS HELPS ME WITH THE HOUSEWORK AND TELLS ME ABOUT HIS DAY AT SCHOOL...

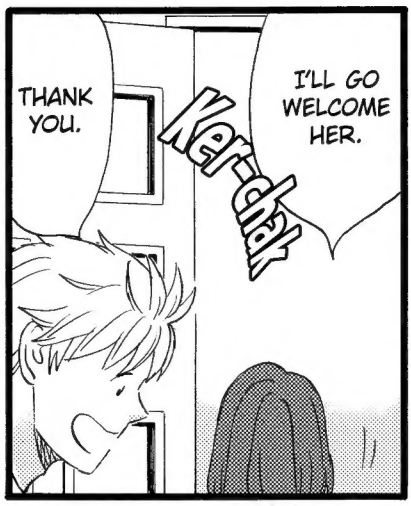
HM...?
HOWEVER ...

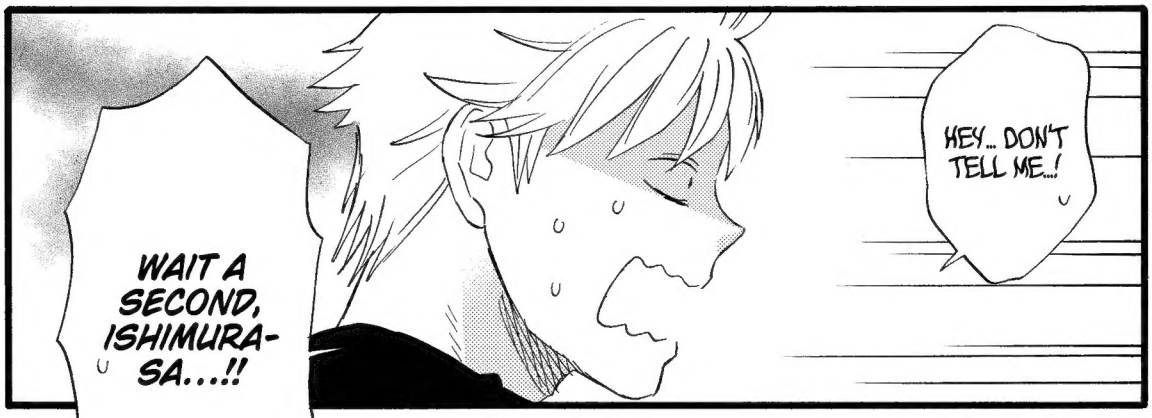

THESE HAVE BEEN CALM AND BALANCED DAYS.
I KIND OF WONDER IF THIS IS WHAT IT FEELS LIKE TO HAVE A CHILD.

MAYBE WE SHOULD START TURNING ON THE AIR CONDITIONER.


WELL, THE DAYS HAVE BEEN GETTING WARMER...
JUST A LITTLE.
YOU'RE SWEATING, MIYAKE-KUN. ARE YOU HOT?

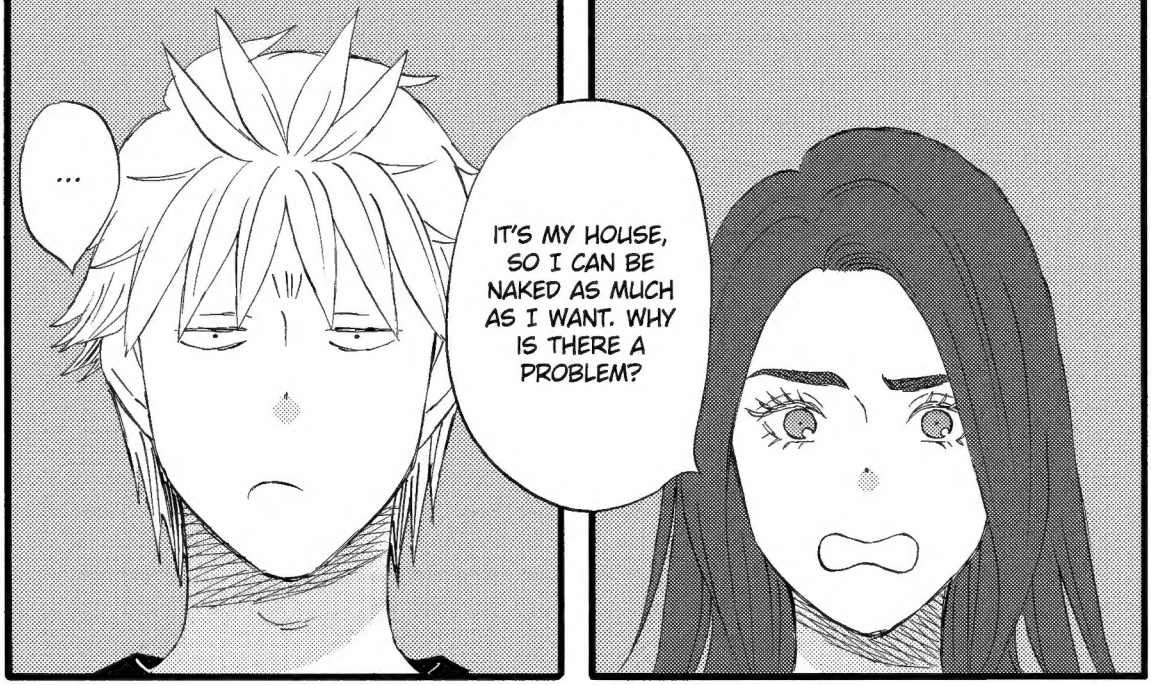
OH. ISHIMURA-SAN IS BACK.
I'M HOOOME...!

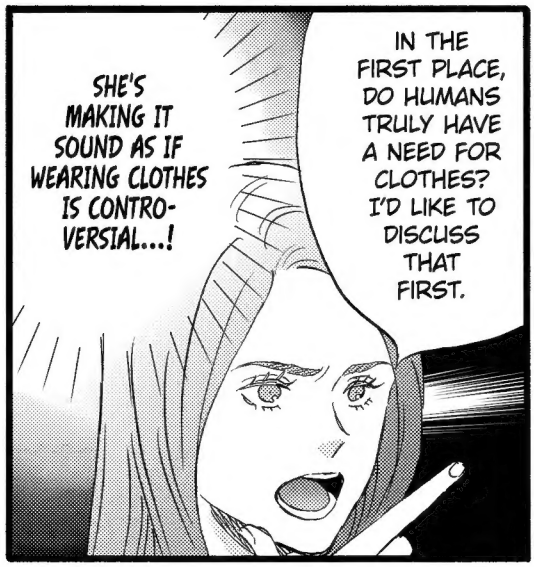




WAIT A SECOND, ISHIMURA-SA...!!

I CERTAINLY DIDN'T THINK THAT OUR CALM AND BALANCE WOULD BE LOST LIKE THIS...


...
IT'S MY HOUSE, SO I CAN BE NAKED AS MUCH AS I WANT. WHY IS THERE A PROBLEM?


IN THE FIRST PLACE, DO HUMANS TRULY HAVE A NEED FOR CLOTHES? I'D LIKE TO DISCUSS THAT FIRST.
SHE'S MAKING IT SOUND AS IF WEARING CLOTHES IS CONTRO-VERSIAL...!

OF COURSE THERE'S A PROBLEM! MIYAKE-KUN IS HERE!
AT THE VERY LEAST, KEEP YOUR CLOTHES ON UNTIL HE GOES HOME!
NO... HOLD ON.
Bang

HUMANS ARE THE ONLY CREATURES WHO COVER THEIR BODIES WITH INTRICATE PIECES OF FABRIC.
SURE ENOUGH, I RECOGNIZE THE USEFULNESS OF WINTER CLOTHES.
BUT IT'S PRETTY HOT THESE DAYS.

CLOTHES ARE UNNECESSARY!! IN FACT, IT'D BE MORE STRANGE TO WEAR THEM...!!!

I'M SORRY, MIYAKE-KUN.

BUT TRUST ME. NOT ALL ADULTS ARE LIKE THIS, OKAY...?

OKAY...

HEY, ISHIMURA-SAN... WERE YOU ALSO ALWAYS NAKED AT HOME WHEN YOUR FATHER WAS STILL ALIVE?

FATHER WAS ALWAYS STRICT ABOUT WEARING CLOTHES, SO I HAD TO WEAR THEM IN ALL PLACES EXCEPT MY OWN ROOM.

HE WAS ALWAYS NAGGING ME ABOUT IT.

RIGHT UP UNTIL HE DREW HIS FINAL BREATH.

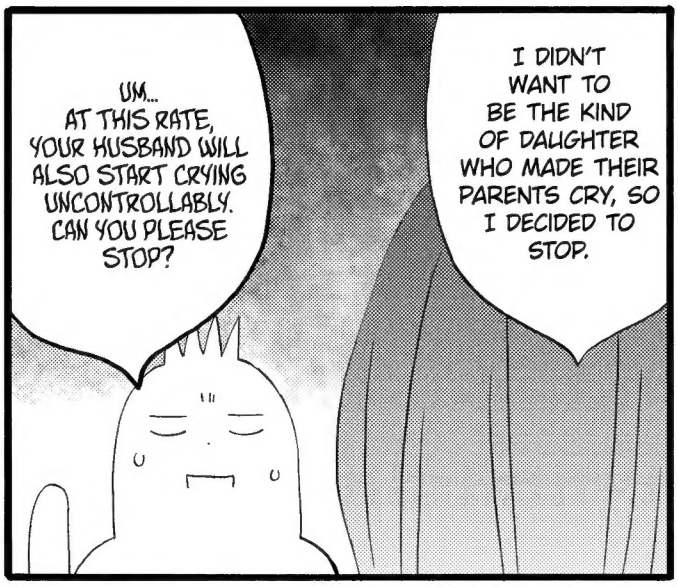
UNTIL THE BITTER END, HUH...?

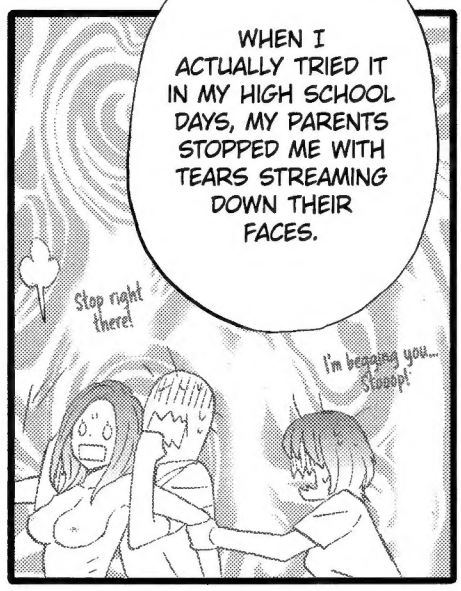
THIS PROBLEM IS MORE DEEP-ROOTED THAN I THOUGHT.

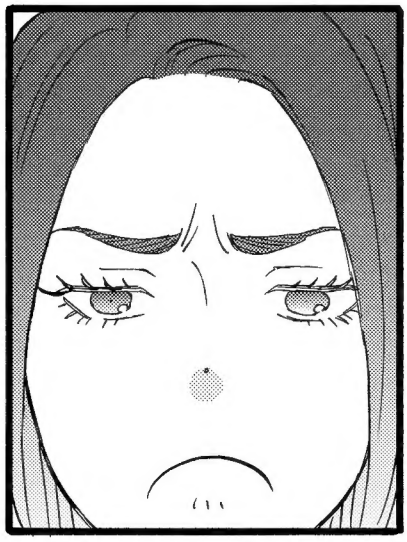
YOU SAY ALL THAT, BUT IF I TOLD YOU TO GO OUTSIDE NAKED, YOU WOULDN'T DO IT... WOULD YOU?

EVEN FOR HER, THAT WOULD SURELY BE EMBARRASSING.

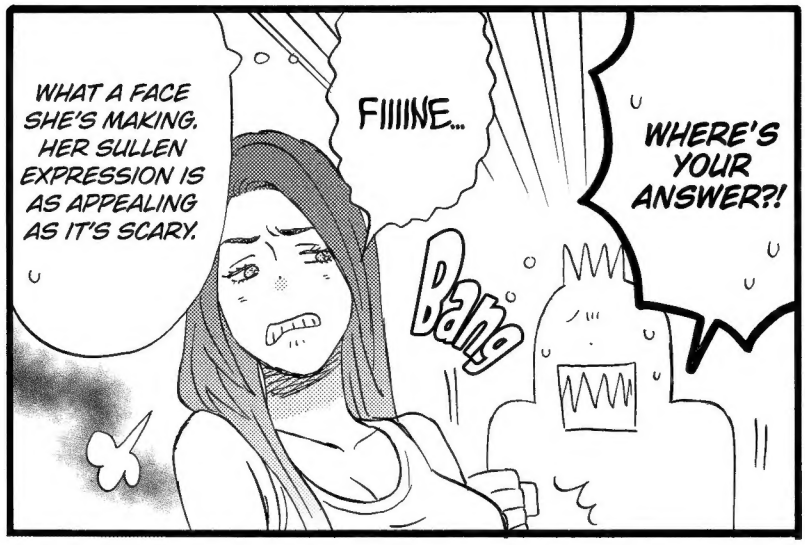
I'D LOVE TO DO THAT, BUT...

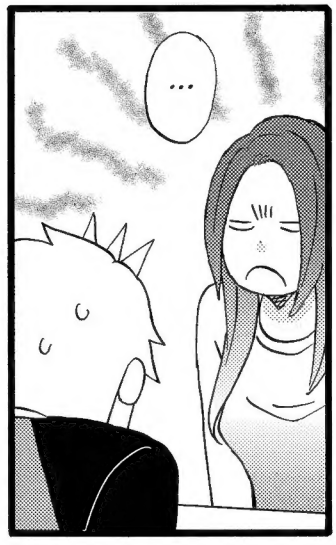

UM... AT THIS RATE, YOUR HUSBAND WILL ALSO START CRYING UNCONTROLLABLY. CAN YOU PLEASE STOP?
I DIDN'T WANT TO BE THE KIND OF DAUGHTER WHO MADE THEIR PARENTS CRY, SO I DECIDED TO STOP.


WHEN I ACTUALLY TRIED IT IN MY HIGH SCHOOL DAYS, MY PARENTS STOPPED ME WITH TEARS STREAMING DOWN THEIR FACES.
Stop right there!
I'm begging you... Stoooop!



UNTIL MIYAKE-KUN GOES HOME, PLEASE STAY DRESSED, OKAY?
ANYWAY, THERE'S AN ADOLESCENT BOY COMING IN AND OUT OF OUR HOUSE NOW. SO...


WHAT A FACE SHE'S MAKING. HER SULLEN EXPRESSION IS AS APPEALING AS IT'S SCARY.
FIIIINE...
WHERE'S YOUR ANSWER?!
Bang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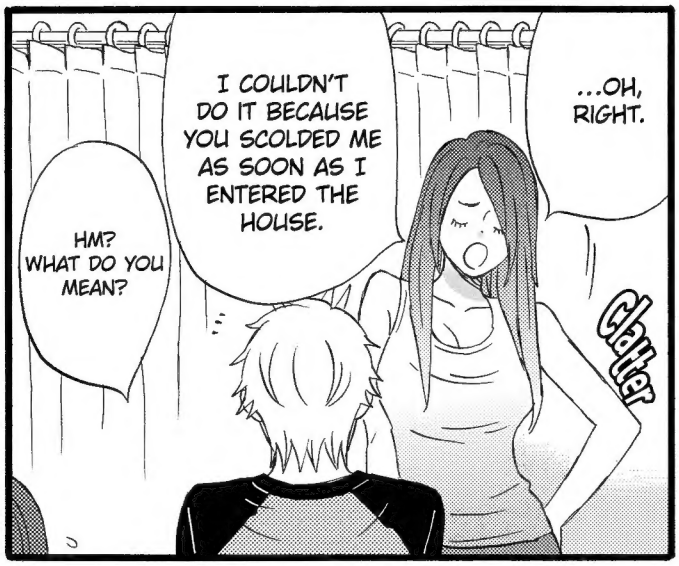
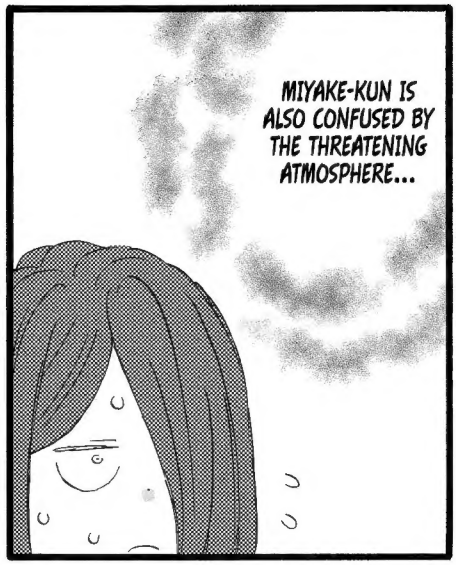
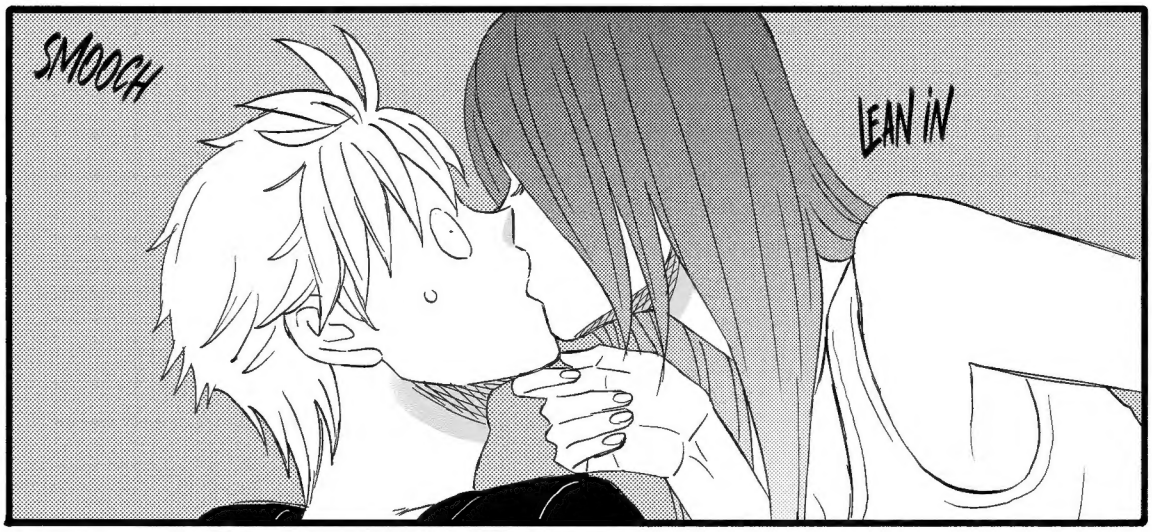
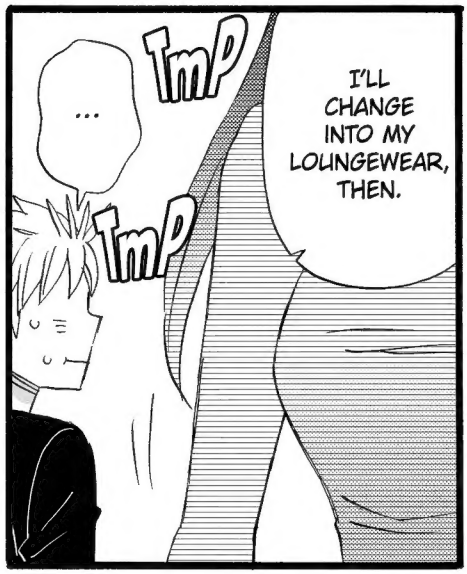
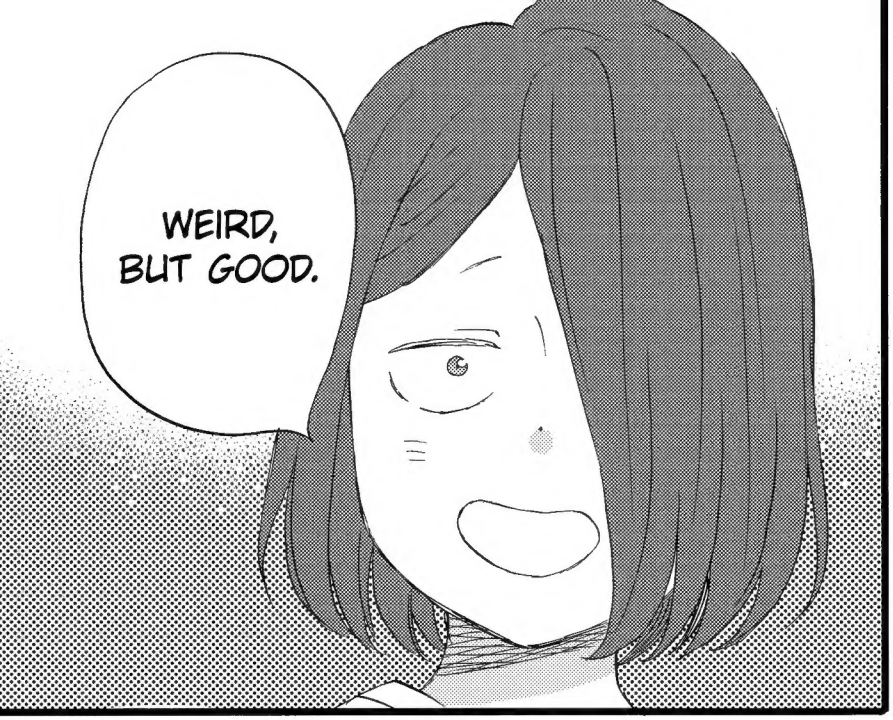

HM? WHAT DO YOU MEAN?
I COULDN'T DO IT BECAUSE YOU SCOLDED ME AS SOON AS I ENTERED THE HOUSE.
...OH, RIGHT.
Clatter


MIYAKE-KUN IS ALSO CONFUSED BY THE THREATENING ATMOSPHERE...

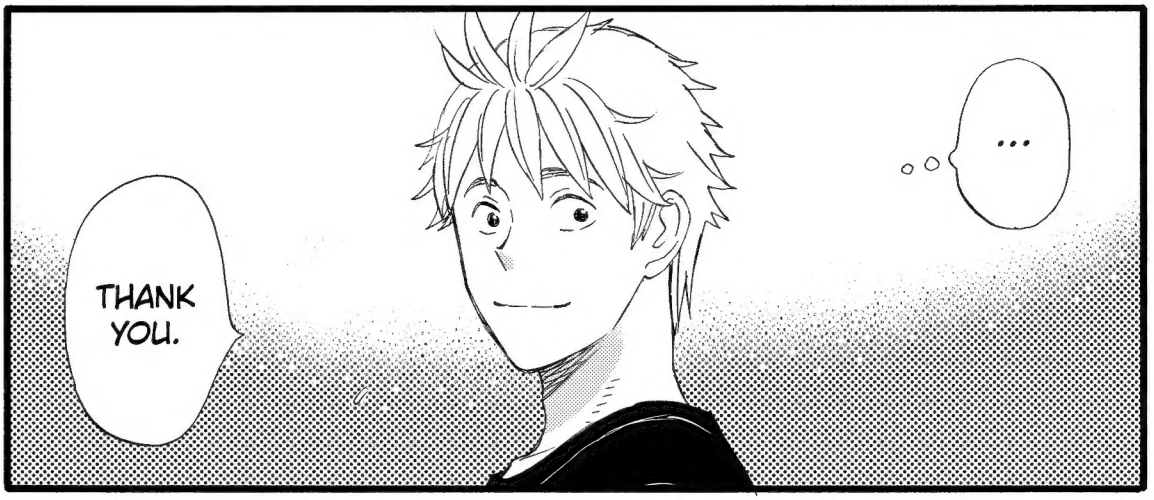

SMOOCH
LEAN IN


...
TmP
TmP
I'LL CHANGE INTO MY LOUNGEWEAR, THEN.

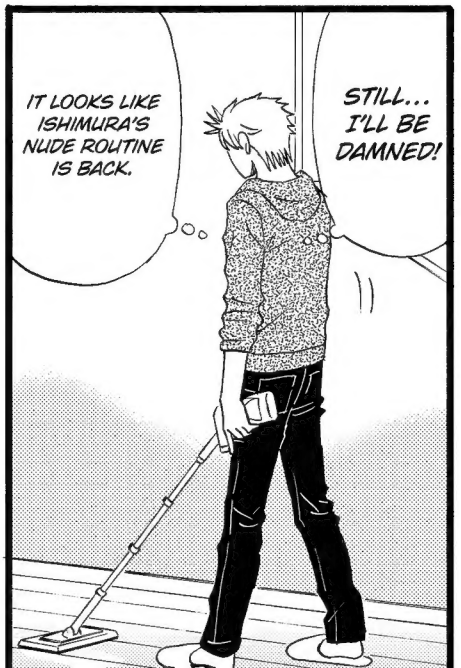
OUR "WELCOME BACK" KISS.


WEIRD, BUT GOOD.

HEH HEH!
WHAT A WEIRD COUPLE.
HA HA... HA HA HA HA HA!


...
THANK YOU.

WELL... I GUESS I'M USED TO IT BY NOW.
ASIDE FROM WINTER, SHE SPENT THE REST OF THE YEAR NAKED.

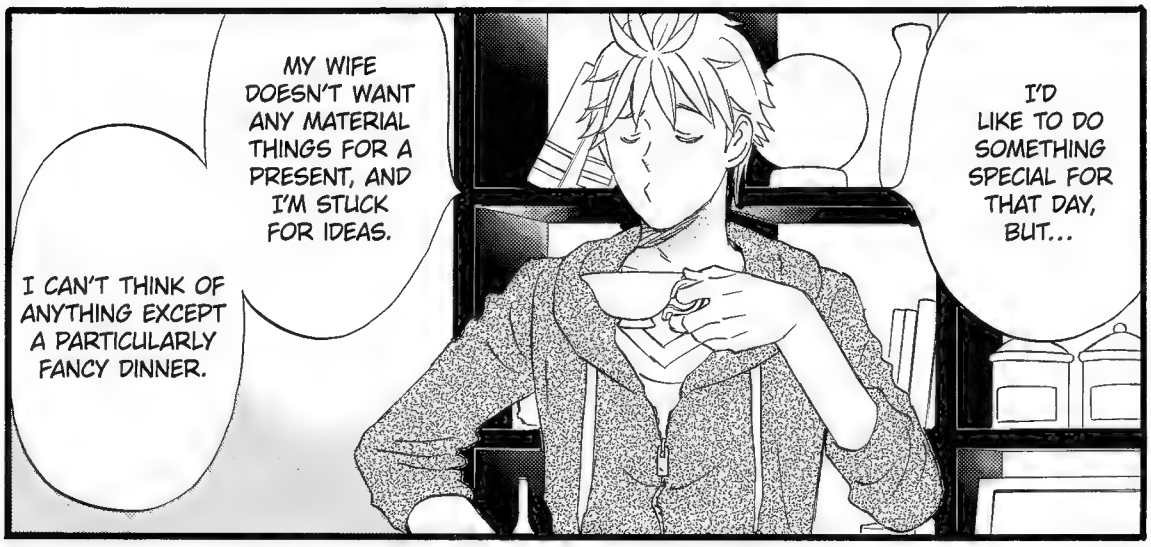

STILL... I'LL BE DAMNED!
IT LOOKS LIKE ISHIMURA'S NUDE ROUTINE IS BACK.

IT'S BEEN ALMOST A YEAR SINCE WE GOT MARRIED!

...HUH? HOLD ON A SECOND. THAT MEANS...

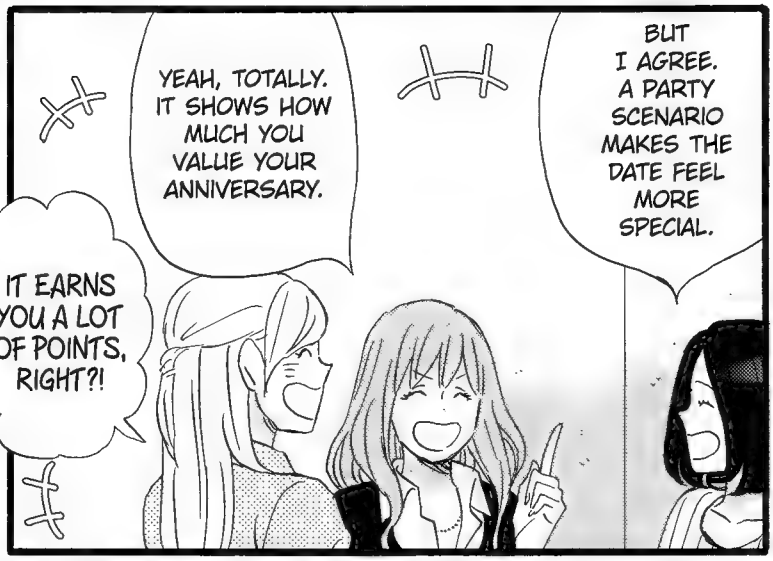
I SEE... SO YOU GUYS ARE CELEBRATING A YEAR SOON.
THAT'S RIGHT.

YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT TO DO FOR YOUR WEDDING ANNIVERSARY?


I'D LIKE TO DO SOMETHING SPECIAL FOR THAT DAY, BUT...
MY WIFE DOESN'T WANT ANY MATERIAL THINGS FOR A PRESENT, AND I'M STUCK FOR IDEAS.
I CAN'T THINK OF ANYTHING EXCEPT A PARTICULARLY FANCY DINNER.

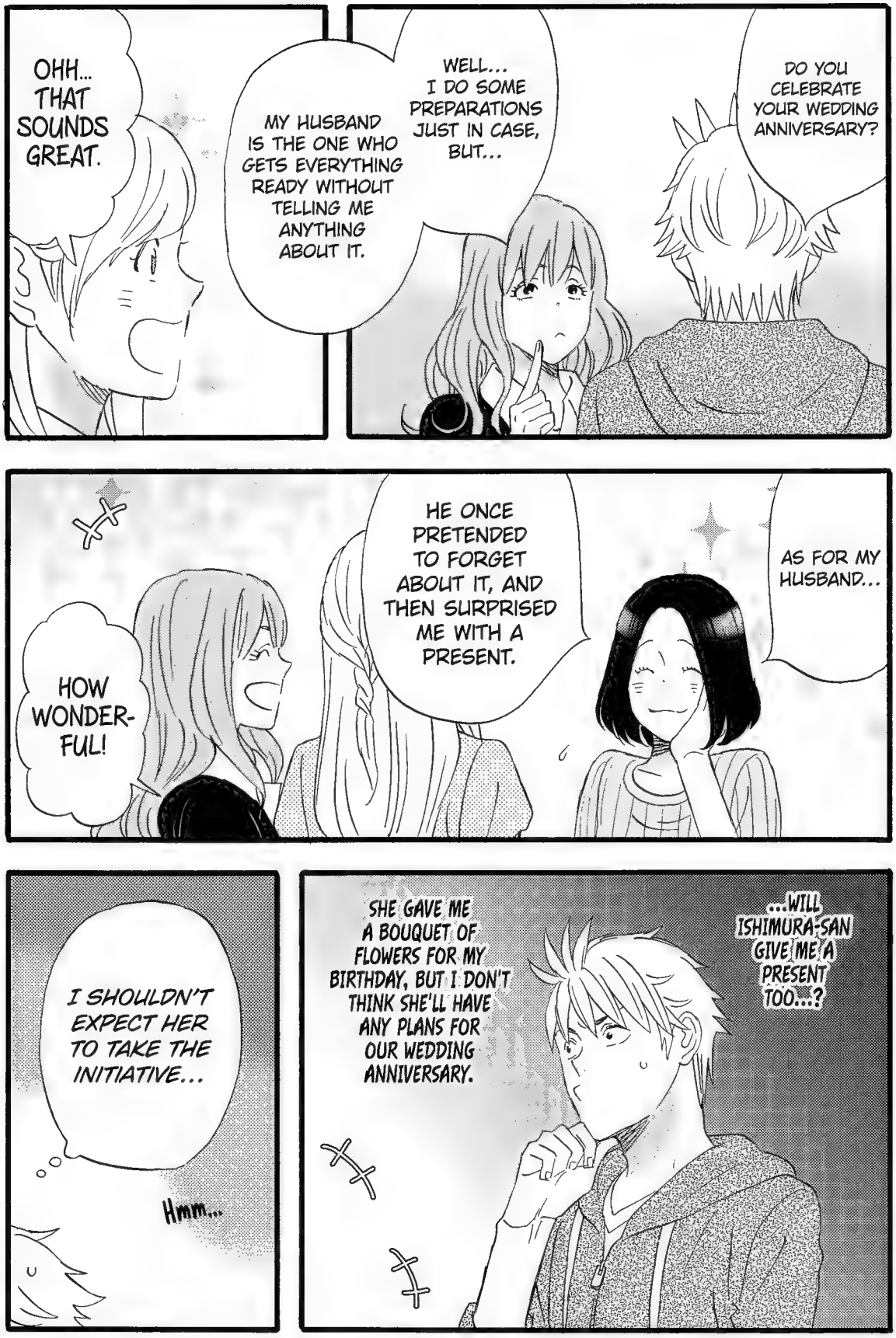
GOSH, THAT'S ADORABLE...
A PARTY-LIKE MOOD MAKES THINGS MORE EXCITING!
HMM... HOW ABOUT DECORATING THE HOUSE?
I WAS WONDERING WHAT NORMAL MARRIED COUPLES DO ON THEIR ANNIVERSARY.

...I CAN'T HELP BUT FEEL SOME HINTS OF CALCULATION IN THAT PLAN. IT'S AS IF... IT'S NOT ENTIRELY GENUINE.
Riiiight?

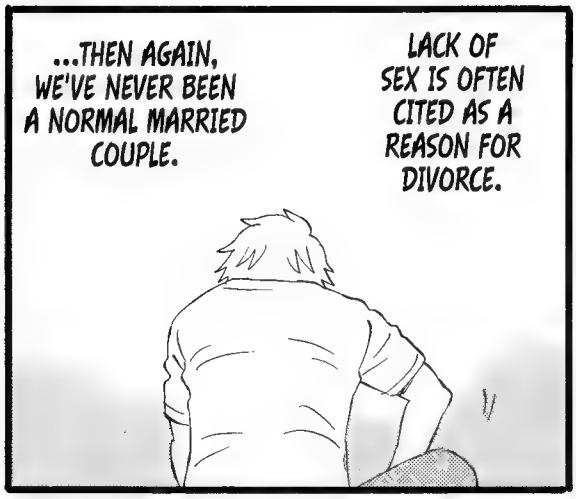

YEAH, TOTALLY. IT SHOWS HOW MUCH YOU VALUE YOUR ANNIVERSARY.
BUT I AGREE. A PARTY SCENARIO MAKES THE DATE FEEL MORE SPECIAL.
IT EARNS YOU A LOT OF POINTS, RIGHT?!

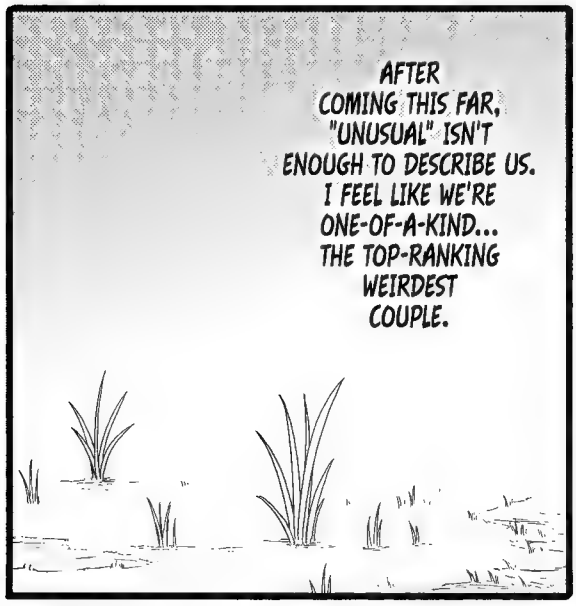
TWO YEARS!
FIVE YEARS.
THREE YEARS FOR ME.

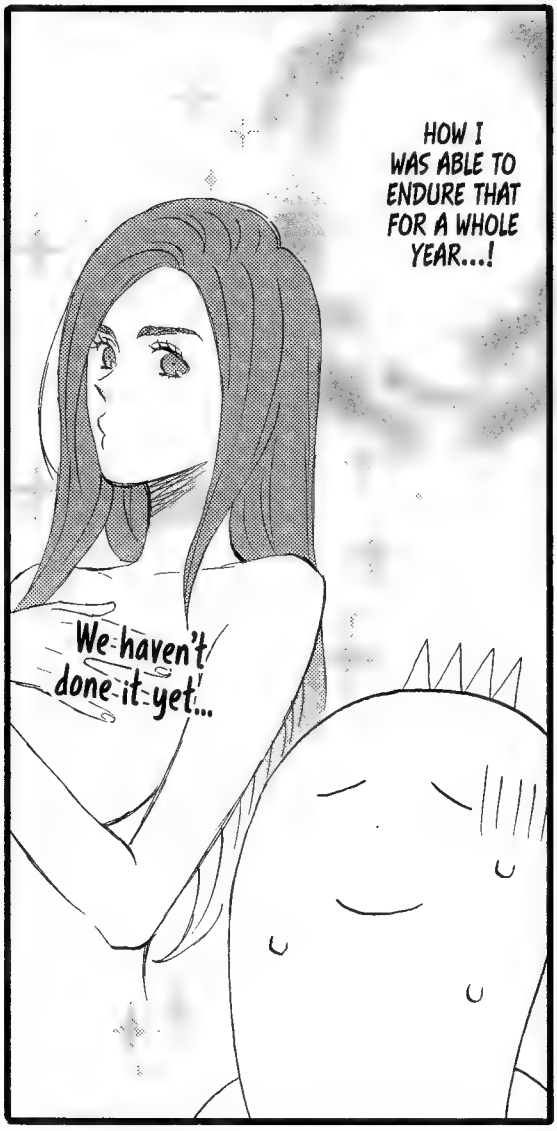
SO, UM... HOW LONG HAVE YOU ALL BEEN MARRIED?
BUT WELL... I CAN'T RUSH TO CONCLUSIONS HERE.

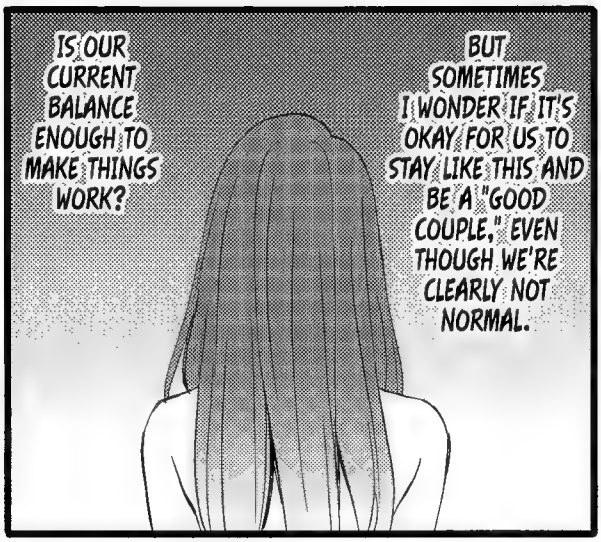

OHH... THAT SOUNDS GREAT.
MY HUSBAND IS THE ONE WHO GETS EVERYTHING READY WITHOUT TELLING ME ANYTHING ABOUT IT.
WELL... I DO SOME PREPARATIONS JUST IN CASE, BUT...
DO YOU CELEBRATE YOUR WEDDING ANNIVERSARY?
HOW WONDER-FUL!
HE ONCE PRETENDED TO FORGET ABOUT IT, AND THEN SURPRISED ME WITH A PRESENT.
AS FOR MY HUSBAND...
I SHOULDN'T EXPECT HER TO TAKE THE INITIATIVE...
Hmm...
SHE GAVE ME A BOUQUET OF FLOWERS FOR MY BIRTHDAY, BUT I DON'T THINK SHE'LL HAVE ANY PLANS FOR OUR WEDDING ANNIVERSARY.
...WILL ISHIMURA-SAN GIVE ME A PRESENT TOO...?

...REALLY. IT'S AMAZING...
STILL, IT'S BEEN ALMOST A YEAR...
Pull

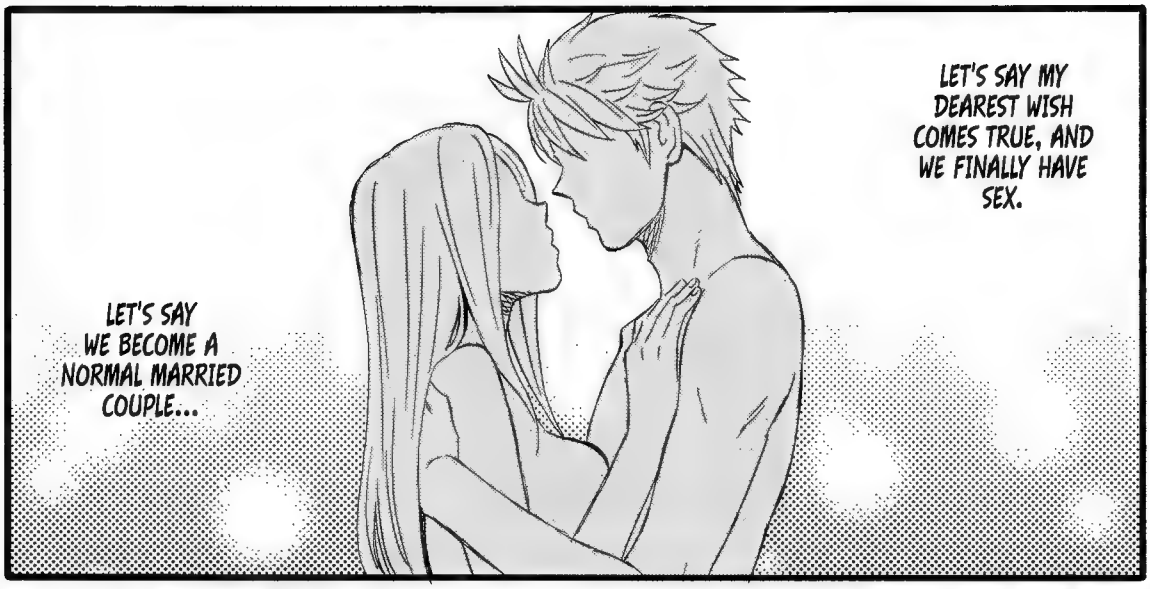

...THEN AGAIN, WE'VE NEVER BEEN A NORMAL MARRIED COUPLE.
LACK OF SEX IS OFTEN CITED AS A REASON FOR DIVORCE.

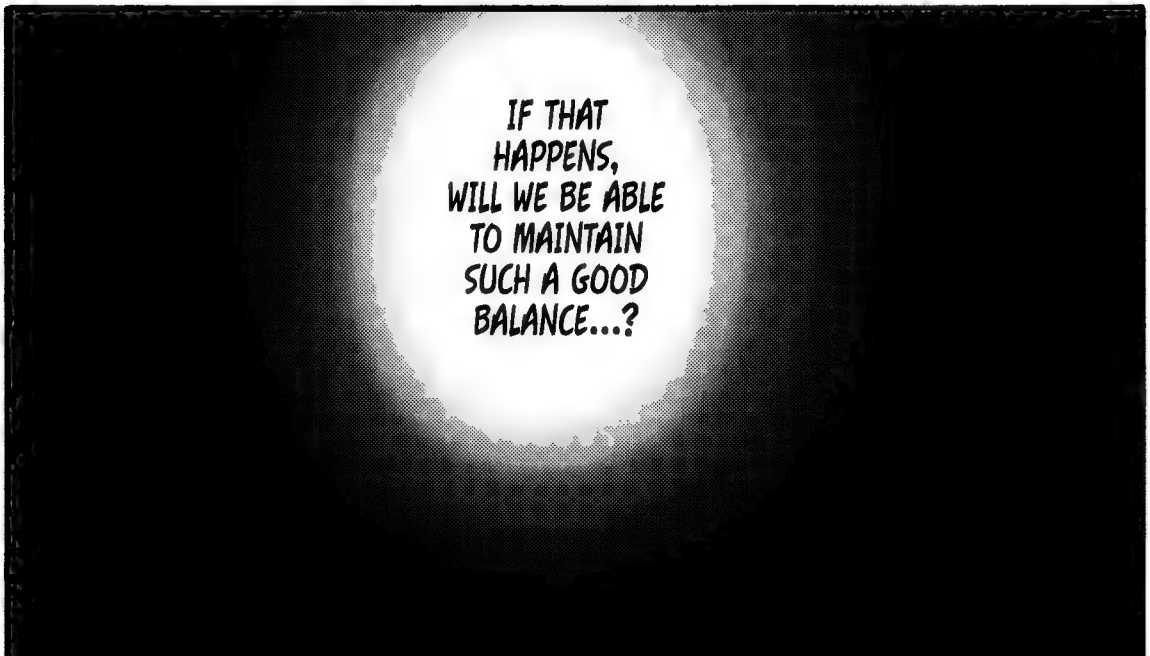

AFTER COMING THIS FAR, "UNUSUAL" ISN'T ENOUGH TO DESCRIBE US. I FEEL LIKE WE'RE ONE-OF-A-KIND... THE TOP-RANKING WEIRDEST COUPLE.

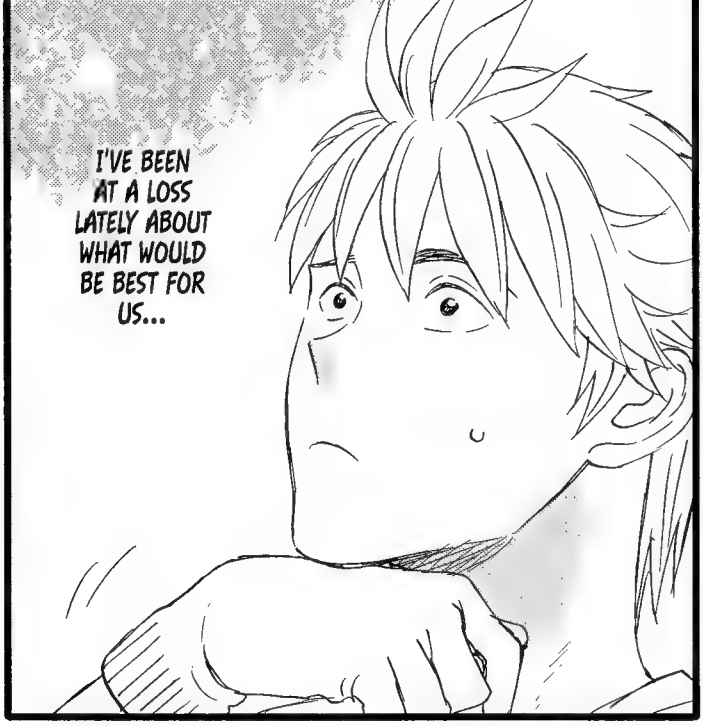

HOW I WAS ABLE TO ENDURE THAT FOR A WHOLE YEAR...!
We haven't done it yet...

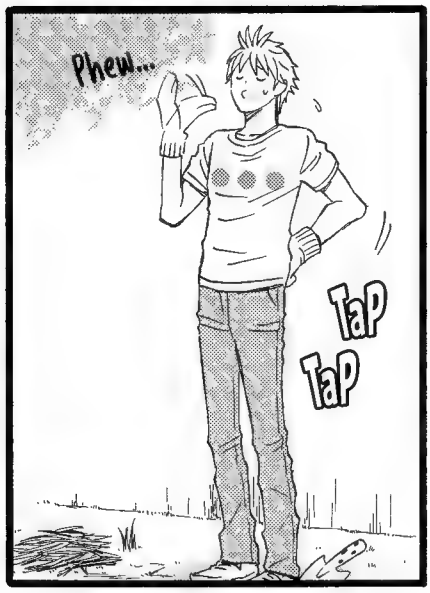

IS OUR CURRENT BALANCE ENOUGH TO MAKE THINGS WORK?
BUT SOMETIMES I WONDER IF IT'S OKAY FOR US TO STAY LIKE THIS AND BE A "GOOD COUPLE," EVEN THOUGH WE'RE CLEARLY NOT NORMAL.

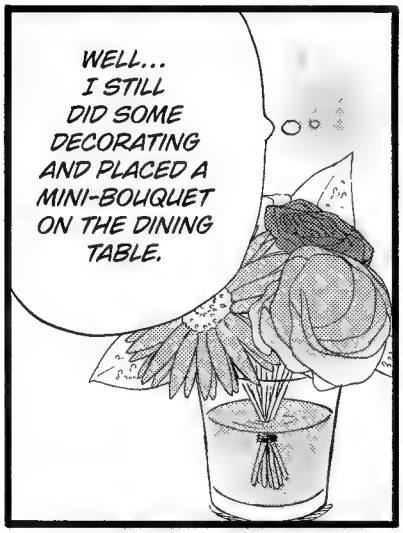
RIGHT. WE'RE A STRANGE AND UNIQUE COUPLE, AND YET IT SEEMS THAT WE LOOK LIKE A GOOD ONE.
"WEIRD, BUT GOOD."

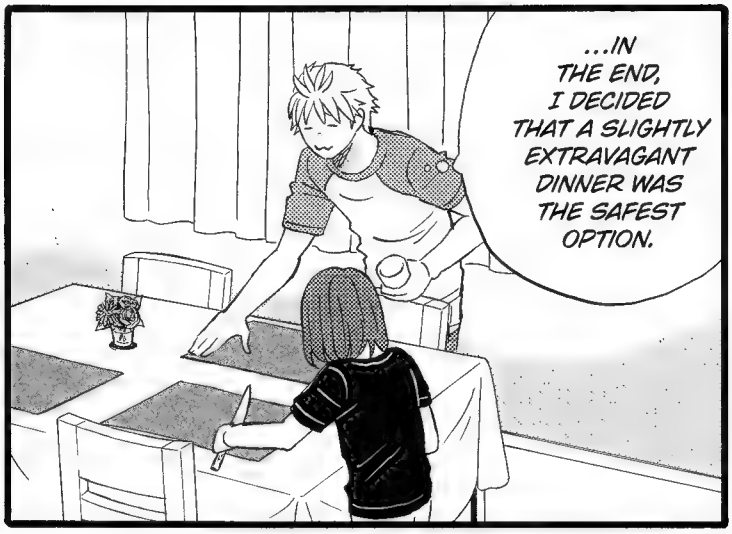

LET'S SAY MY DEAREST WISH COMES TRUE, AND WE FINALLY HAVE SEX.
LET'S SAY WE BECOME A NORMAL MARRIED COUPLE...


IF THAT HAPPENS, WILL WE BE ABLE TO MAINTAIN SUCH A GOOD BALANCE...?

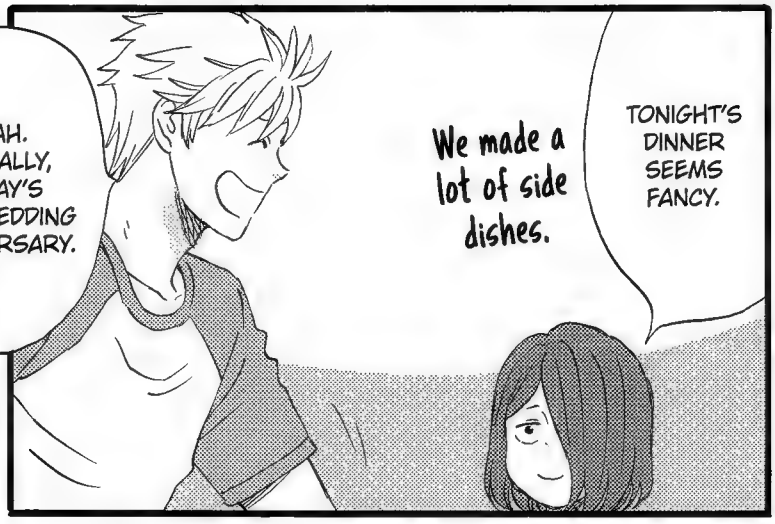

I'VE BEEN AT A LOSS LATELY ABOUT WHAT WOULD BE BEST FOR US...


Phew...
Tap
Tap


WELL... I STILL DID SOME DECORATING AND PLACED A MINI-BOUQUET ON THE DINING TABLE.


...IN THE END, I DECIDED THAT A SLIGHTLY EXTRAVAGANT DINNER WAS THE SAFEST OPTION.

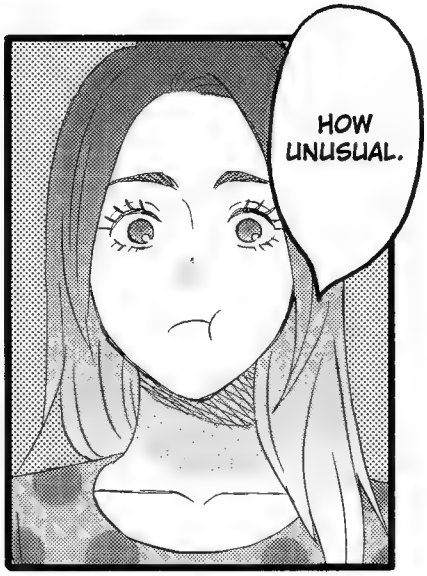
HUH?!
YEAH. ACTUALLY, TODAY'S OUR WEDDING ANNIVERSARY.

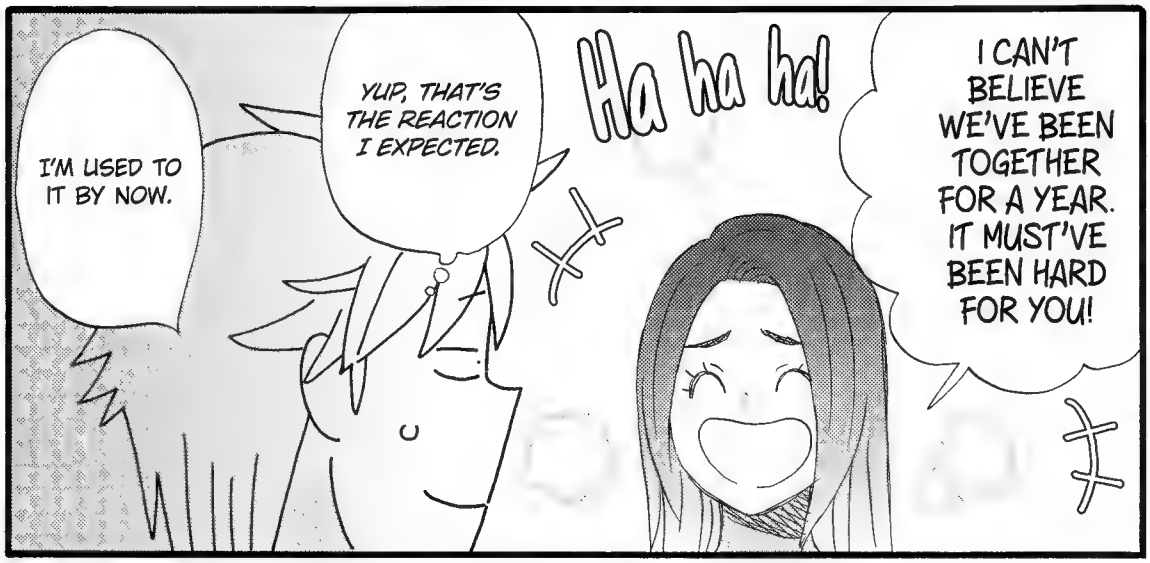

We made a lot of side dishes.
TONIGHT'S DINNER SEEMS FANCY.

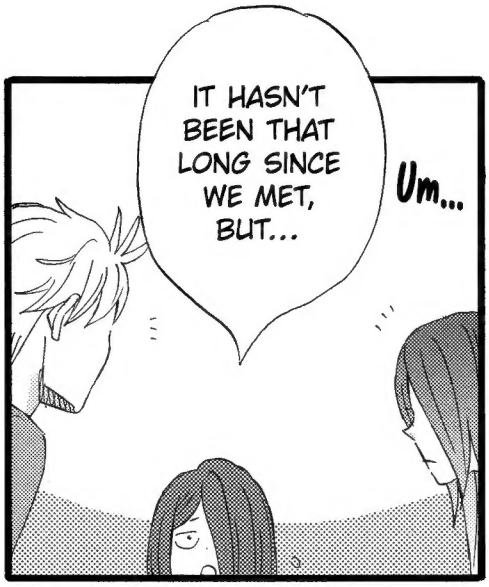
I SEE...
I BET SHE ISN'T EVEN AWARE THAT TODAY'S OUR ANNIVERSARY.

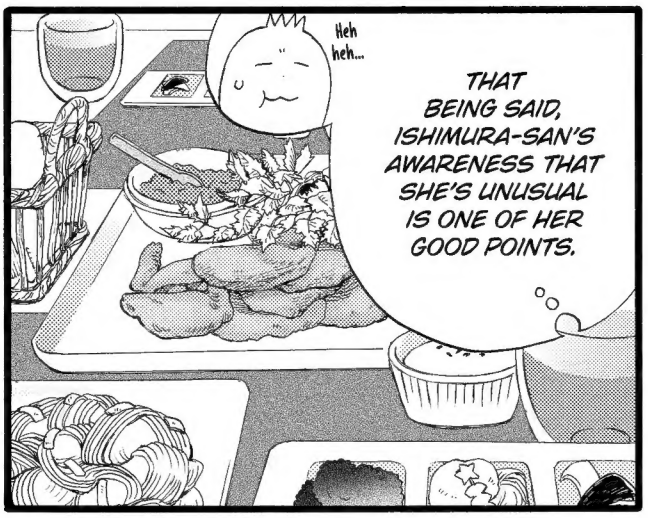
OH... NAH, IT'S FINE! ISHIMURA-SAN DOESN'T CARE AT ALL ABOUT THIS SORT OF THING.
IT'D BE BETTER IF IT'S JUST THE TWO OF YOU, WOULDN'T IT?
I-I SHOULD GO HOME, THEN...

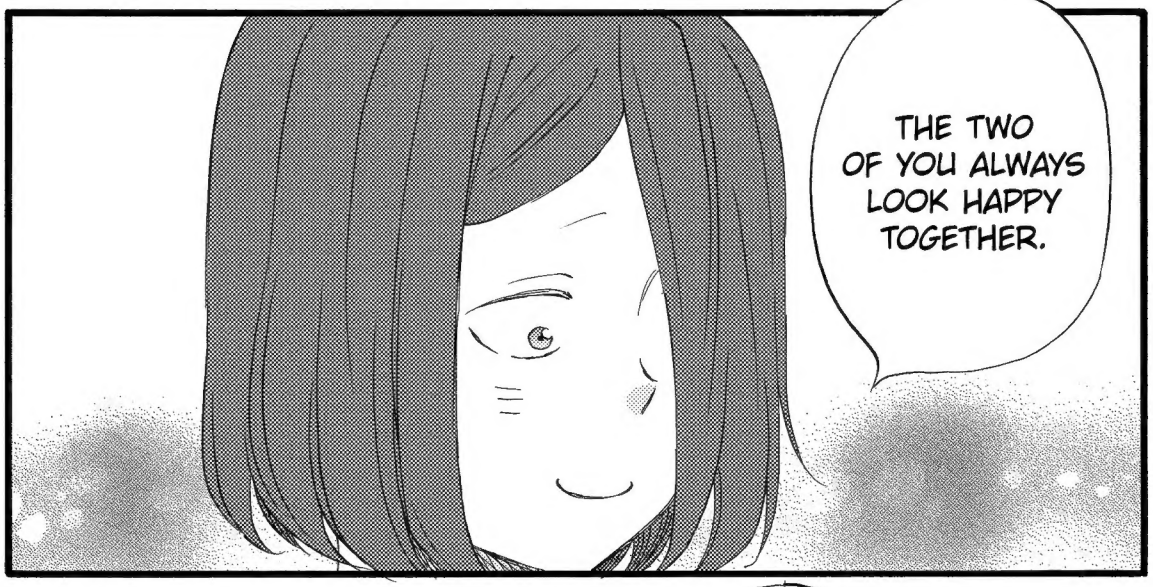
OHH, I SEE. IT WAS TODAY, HUH?
RIGHT... TODAY IS OUR WEDDING ANNIVERSARY, SO I DECIDED TO MAKE THINGS A BIT MORE FESTIVE.
And tonight's dinner looks kinda fancy.
THERE ARE FLOWERS ON THE TABLE.

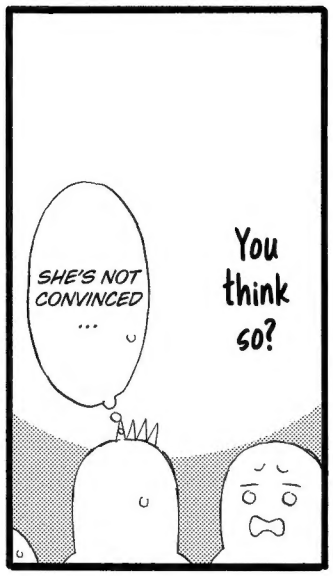

HOW UNUSUAL.


I'M USED TO IT BY NOW.
YUP, THAT'S THE REACTION I EXPECTED.
Ha ha ha!
I CAN'T BELIEVE WE'VE BEEN TOGETHER FOR A YEAR. IT MUST'VE BEEN HARD FOR YOU!

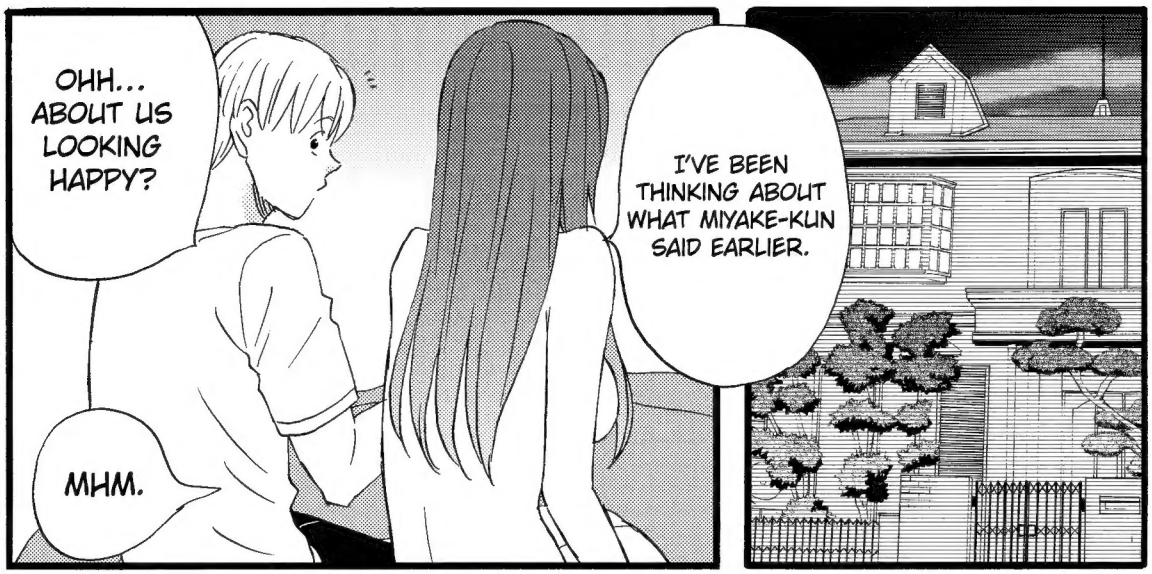

IT HASN'T BEEN THAT LONG SINCE WE MET, BUT...
Um...

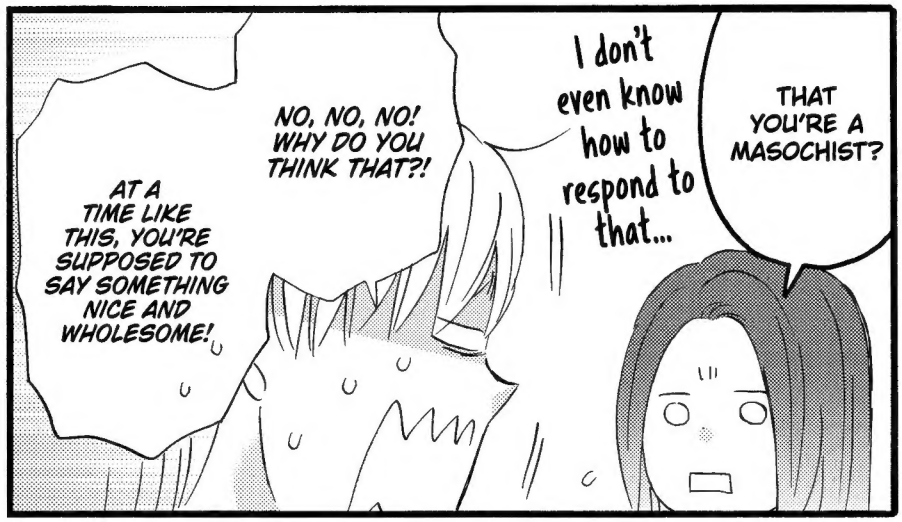

Heh heh...
THAT BEING SAID, ISHIMURA-SAN'S AWARENESS THAT SHE'S UNUSUAL IS ONE OF HER GOOD POINTS.


THE TWO OF YOU ALWAYS LOOK HAPPY TOGETHER.


You think so?
SHE'S NOT CONVINCED ...

...
I THINK YOU'RE A REALLY GOOD COUPLE.

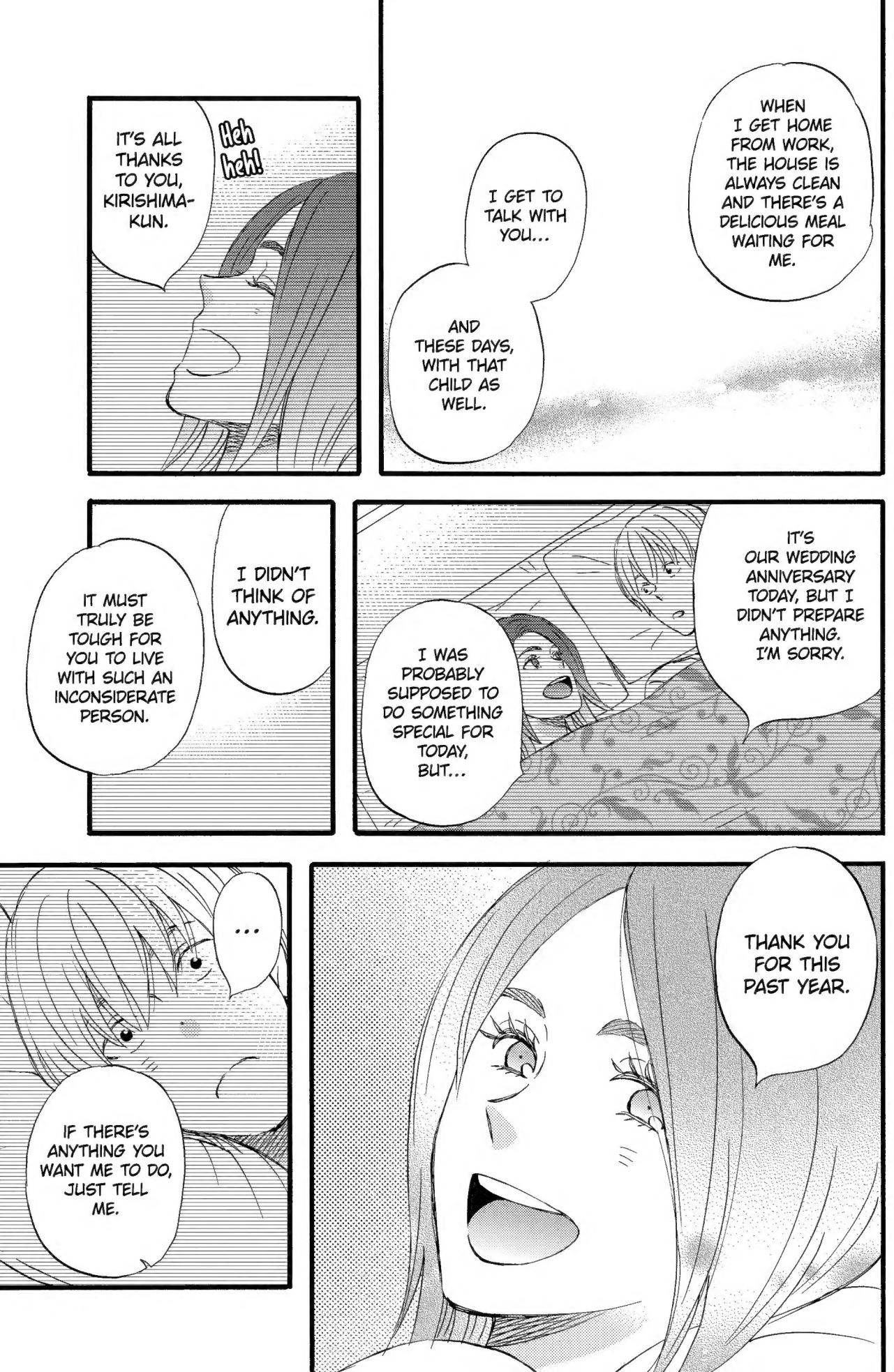

OHH... ABOUT US LOOKING HAPPY?
MHM.
I'VE BEEN THINKING ABOUT WHAT MIYAKE-KUN SAID EARLIER.


AT A TIME LIKE THIS, YOU'RE SUPPOSED TO SAY SOMETHING NICE AND WHOLESOME!
NO, NO, NO! WHY DO YOU THINK THAT?!
I don't even know how to respond to that...
THAT YOU'RE A MASOCHIST?

COULD IT BE...

WELL, I THINK HE'S RIGHT.

HEH HEH! IT SEEMS SO.
STILL, IT'S NOT JUST ME. HE SAID THAT YOU APPEAR TO LOOK HAPPY TOO.
GOOD GRIEF...


WHEN I GET HOME FROM WORK, THE HOUSE IS ALWAYS CLEAN AND THERE'S A DELICIOUS MEAL WAITING FOR ME.
I GET TO TALK WITH YOU...
AND THESE DAYS, WITH THAT CHILD AS WELL.
IT'S ALL THANKS TO YOU, KIRISHIMA-KUN.
Heh heh!
IT'S OUR WEDDING ANNIVERSARY TODAY, BUT I DIDN'T PREPARE ANYTHING. I'M SORRY.
I WAS PROBABLY SUPPOSED TO DO SOMETHING SPECIAL FOR TODAY, BUT...
I DIDN'T THINK OF ANYTHING.
IT MUST TRULY BE TOUGH FOR YOU TO LIVE WITH SUCH AN INCONSIDERATE PERSON.
THANK YOU FOR THIS PAST YEAR.
...
IF THERE'S ANYTHING YOU WANT ME TO DO, JUST TELL ME.

"IS OUR CURRENT BALANCE ENOUGH TO MAKE THINGS WORK?"

"LET'S SAY MY DEAREST WISH COMES TRUE, AND WE FINALLY HAVE SEX. LET'S SAY WE BECOME A NORMAL MARRIED COUPLE..."

"IF THAT HAPPENS, WILL WE BE ABLE TO MAINTAIN SUCH A GOOD BALANCE...?"